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Bernero Hails Lansing's Progress in Tenth State of the City Address

Mayor Seeks Charter Amendments to Strengthen BWL Accountability

Launches Regional Initiative to Improve Community Health and Fitness

(LANSING) – Mayor Virg Bernero tonight delivered his tenth State of the City Address to a capacity crowd at the new Gannon Commons facility on the campus of Lansing Community College. In his address – entitled “Lansing 3.0” – Bernero noted the city’s progress over the past year and outlined several key initiatives for the year ahead, including reforms designed to ensure greater accountability at the city-owned Lansing Board of Water and Light.

“Make no mistake, as we begin our tenth year together, the state of our city – and the Lansing Metro – is strong and getting stronger,” Bernero said. “The momentum of our economic recovery continues to build and our future prospects have rarely looked brighter.”

Bernero delivered his annual remarks at Lansing Community College to highlight the college’s achievements in preparing people of all ages for success through education. The mayor commended President Brent Knight’s stewardship of the campus and touted LCC’s innovative approaches to training the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Bernero described Lansing 3.0 as “the next Lansing” and said the city must continually adapt to rapid economic, social and technological changes in order to be globally competitive.

“To keep growing and adapting, we must have a vision for what comes next, a strategic framework for making our city globally competitive, smart and sustainable, healthy, resilient and inclusive, and a powerful magnet for young talent, entrepreneurs, innovators and immigrants,” he said.

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Hailing the Lansing Metro's rebound from the Great Recession, Bernero noted that unemployment has dropped to its lowest level in more than 12 years, home values continue to rise, and the area's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew three times faster than Ann Arbor's in 2013, according to the latest statistics.

Pointing to major new investments in General Motors' Lansing Grand River and Lansing Delta Township assembly plants – and the soon-to-arrive Chevy Camaro – Bernero said Lansing continues to “make the products that make America great.”

The mayor highlighted key economic development projects championed by his administration, including the modernization of Cooley Law School Stadium, renovation of the iconic Knapp's Centre on Washington Square, and a series of residential and mixed-use projects by the Gillespie Group, including The Outfield, Marketplace and Midtown.

In the year ahead, Bernero said numerous new projects will commence in the city, including the long-awaited Red Cedar Renaissance, Sparrow Hospital's \$65 million expansion on Michigan Avenue, the new headquarters of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, Metro Place at the former YMCA building, Niowave's \$79 million medical isotope facility at the airport, Neogen's renovation of the old Estes Furniture building, and the continued expansion of Emergent Biosolutions.

In the most anticipated part of his remarks, Mayor Bernero proposed a series of reforms that will ensure greater accountability at the Lansing Board of Water and Light. He noted that long-term contracts and excessive severance payments for BWL executives are strong evidence of the need for structural reforms that strengthen the city-owned utility's accountability to the Mayor, City Council and ratepayers.

Bernero's proposal would amend the City Charter to limit the length of employment contracts and prohibit golden parachutes at all city agencies, including the BWL, create a new BWL Inspector General in the mayor's cabinet, and clarify the relationship between the city agency's legal counsel and the Lansing City Attorney.

“We need to go beyond just being prepared for what Mother Nature brings our way. The BWL must also be more accountable to its owners – the City of Lansing – and to ratepayers,” Bernero said. “The City Charter says the BWL shall be accountable to the Mayor and City Council, but let's be honest – it hasn't worked very well. It's time to change the recipe and bake in some real accountability for one of our most valuable assets.” The mayor said he will soon submit his charter amendments to the Lansing City Council for placement on the citywide ballot.

Bernero also announced a new regional health and wellness initiative that includes “Metro Lansing Loses a Million,” a challenge to area residents to lose weight and get healthier. To highlight his personal commitment to the program, Bernero was weighed on stage by Sparrow Health System physician Dr. Farhan Bhatti during his speech.

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“Folks, it goes on easier than it comes off,” Bernero said as he stepped on a scale, “I hope this serves as an inspiration to all of you who want to get healthy, get fit, and drop the extra pounds.”

The mayor’s health and wellness initiative includes a state-of-the-art website at metrolansinglosesamillion.com, where participants can track their nutrition, weight, glucose, cholesterol and other key metrics of a healthy lifestyle. The site makes it easy to connect with friends and support groups, and to access a wide range of community resources to help achieve your health and fitness goals.

Bernero noted the need to create a “smarter city” through education and workforce development, pointing to the recent launch of Lansing SAVE – Student Accounts Valuing Education. In partnership with the Lansing School District and MSU Federal Credit Union, SAVE will provide a free education savings account to every incoming class of kindergartners in Lansing’s public schools over the next four years and beyond.

Mayor Bernero also hinted at the possibility of imminent good news about the city’s Lansing Kewadin casino project, which would fully fund the Lansing Promise scholarship program. The Lansing Promise would offer four years of free college tuition to every child who graduates from the Lansing School District.

“We’ve traveled a long road together over the past nine years. Through it all, Lansing – and you who call it home – have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, ingenuity, courage and caring for one another,” Bernero concluded. “As we move boldly and decisively into the next Lansing – Lansing 3.0 – I promise to keep dreaming big dreams for Lansing. I know you will, too.”

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